



# *Praying through Advent*

23 MEDITATIONS FOR THE 23 DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

*by Teresa Blythe*

---



Thank you for downloading this free e-booklet with meditations for each day of Advent 2018.

I hope these meditations and prayers help you center and appreciate the beauty of Advent.

You may be wondering who I am!

I've been a spiritual director for over 20 years working with individuals and groups to reflect on how and where God is showing up in their lives. I also run the Hesychia School of Spiritual Direction at the Redemptorist Renewal Center at Picture Rocks in Tucson, Arizona and serve as Spiritual Director on staff of First UCC Phoenix. I received spiritual direction formation and training at San Francisco Theological Seminary along with a Master in Divinity (2000).

I'm an ordained United Church of Christ (UCC) minister and member of Spiritual Directors International.

More importantly, I'm a person who believes in the power and meaning we find in prayer---a variety of prayer practices.

Most of these practices for Advent 2018 come from my book *50 Ways to Pray* which can be found on Amazon along with my latest book *Spiritual Direction 101: The Basics of Spiritual Guidance*.

Feel free to contact me at [teresa@teresablythe.net](mailto:teresa@teresablythe.net) for more information on any of this, or just to say Hi!

Deep Peace of Advent to You,

Teresa Blythe

December 2, 2018

## First Day of Advent

Praying with Ignatius of Loyola

Advent is the perfect time for reflection on the past, the present and hope for the future. The season honors the days prior to the birth of Jesus---a time of waiting in anticipation for Mary and her family. It's also a time to enjoy the new thing God is about to do in your life.

This Advent season, SD101 will offer one prayer practice a day for you to use, pass along or save for later. Most of these practices can be found my book [\*50 Ways to Pray\*](#) by Abingdon Press.

Our first practice is to reflect on Mary and Joseph's journey right before Jesus was born.

### The Practice

Within the 16<sup>th</sup> century classic *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola is the practice of imaginatively entering a scene out of scripture that involves an aspect of Jesus' life. For this prayer, use your imagination and the application of all your senses to ponder a short piece of the Nativity story from the gospel of Luke.

- Begin by asking God to be present in your imagination. Ask for the awareness to notice this presence.
- Read Luke 2:1-5.

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. (NRSV)*

- On the first reading, simply take in the details of the story. Pause in silence. Then read it a second time, slowly, allowing your mind to visualize the flight to Bethlehem.
- With your mind's eye, see the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. How long is it? How wide? Is it bumpy or smooth? Dusty or muddy? See Mary and Joseph going over hills and valleys. Join the caravan. Where are you in the scene? What part do you play in the unfolding events?
- What sounds do you hear along the road? What are Mary and Joseph saying? As you stand nearby, what are you saying? Does anyone speak to you? What is your reply? What sounds other than voices do you hear?

- What are the smells along the road? Linger a moment and imagine what you are smelling as you stand near the holy family.
- Is there a taste you associate with the scene? Linger a moment and notice what, if anything, your taste buds reveal about the scene.
- In your imagination, move around the scene and touch various people, places and things. Touch Mary, Joseph or one of the people accompanying them. Touch an angel or a passer-by, if they are present in your scene. Touch the dirt of the road, the hide of an animal. Notice what sensations you experience as you imagine touching someone or something in the scene.
- Let your full imagination run free at the close of the story read in scripture. Allow the scene to change in any way you feel inspired. Imagine what more there is to the story than what is recorded in scripture. Linger and interact with the characters there. What are you doing? Do you go off to tell someone about your experience? How do you describe what happened?
- When you feel finished with the imagination exercise, think about the meaning of the journey of Mary and Joseph for your life. Consider the way they had to leave their town at a difficult time in their life. What does this mean for you? What part of the story warms your heart most? What part of the story disturbs you most? What insight does your imagination prayer provide?
- Dialogue with one of the characters in the story. Do this in your imagination or on paper—whatever is easiest for you.

Conclude with a short prayer of thanks for all you experienced in this prayer.

December 3, 2018

Advent Meditation Practice - Here I Am Prayer

If you find it hard to relax into prayer during Advent, try this contemplative exercise. It's adapted from Anthony Bloom's classic book *Beginning to Pray*. Bloom, a Russian Orthodox Archbishop who died in 2003, wrote this short book in 1970 and it continues to be an inspiration to people of prayer today. In his chapter, "Managing Time," Bloom describes this prayer exercise in narrative form.<sup>i</sup> I've broken it down into steps. It is so simple and short it can be used daily as a prelude to other prayer practices.

### The Practice

- Resolve to be in prayer for at least five minutes. Do not answer the phone or allow yourself to be distracted from your goal.
- Be seated and say to yourself "*Here I am* seated, doing nothing. I will do nothing for five minutes" (or longer, depending on the time you set for yourself).
- Begin noticing your own bodily presence. How your body feels next to the chair. How your feet feel against the floor. Relax your body. Notice what you feel inside.
- Now notice the presence of all that is around you. Say to yourself, "*Here I am* in the presence of the room (garden, chapel, wherever you are)." Be aware of the furniture, walls, any pets or people in the room. Just be present and silent in your environment. Relax even more.
- Now say to yourself, "*Here I am* in the presence of God." Repeat silently to God, "*Here I am.*" Bask in the presence of the Holy One until your time goal has been reached.

This is a wonderful prayer to lead you into meditation any time of year.



## December 4, 2018

### Advent Meditation – Lectio Divina (Praying with Scripture)

For many Christians, praying daily with scripture is an important devotional practice. There are a number of ways to do this. One of the easiest and most portable is to use the Irish Jesuit's *Sacred Space 2019* prayer book or find it free on their website ([www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)). They include a short snippet of scripture from the daily lectionary—scriptures chosen to be read in churches and homes worldwide—with suggestions for points of reflection. You can read it daily with the book or online at your computer or smartphone and use it for the practice of *lectio divina* (“prayerful reading”) as outlined below.

Here's another structure to help you do lectio divina with any scripture. I'm posting today's lectionary passage for your reflection. Why not try lectio and also check out *Sacred Space 2019* to see the options you have for praying with scripture?

#### Scripture

##### ***Revelation 22:12-16 The Message (MSG)***

<sup>12-13</sup> “Yes, I’m on my way! I’ll be there soon! I’m bringing my payroll with me. I’ll pay all people in full for their life’s work. I’m A to Z, the First and the Final, Beginning and Conclusion.

<sup>14-15</sup> “How blessed are those who wash their robes! The Tree of Life is theirs for good, and they’ll walk through the gates to the City. But outside for good are the filthy curs: sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters—all who love and live lies.

<sup>16</sup> “I, Jesus, sent my Angel to testify to these things for the churches. I’m the Root and Branch of David, the Bright Morning Star.”

##### ***The Message (MSG)***

Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

#### The Practice

- Step One: *Silencio*. Become still and quiet within. Silently turn all your thoughts and desires over to God. Let go of concerns, worries or agendas. Just be for a few minutes.
- Step Two: *Lectio*. Read the passage slowly and carefully, either aloud or silently. Re-read it. Be alert to any word, phrase or image that seems to have energy for you. It could be a word that invites you; a phrase that puzzles you; an image that intrigues you. Wait for this word, phrase or image to speak to you, but do not rush or force it. Read the passage as many times as you like.



- Step Three: *Meditatio*. Take whatever word, phrase or image from the passage that has energy for you and allow yourself to ponder it in your heart. Repeat it to yourself like a mantra. Allow this word, phrase or image to interact with your deepest self—your thoughts, desires, memories. Let it speak to your life.
- Step Four: *Oratio*. Let your soul be deeply in prayer, allowing God to transform us by the word, phrase or image from scripture. Let your feelings be open and honest with God. Let your heart be in dialogue with God. Consider how this word, phrase or image connects with your life today. How is God present to you in it?
- Step Five: *Contemplatio*. Rest silently in the presence of God. Move beyond words, phrases or images. Enjoy the freedom that comes in contemplation.
- If you want, write about this prayer experience in a journal. What is your word, phrase or image? What does God reveal to you in it? What does it have to say about your life right now?

I hope you find this ancient practice meaningful this Advent season. Be sure to use it year-round, as it is a wonderful way to encounter the Holy in scripture, poems and other short writings.



December 5, 2018

Advent Meditation Practice: Dialoguing with Scripture

We need not approach biblical texts passively. We can communicate with the stories. We can talk back to them!

Today's Advent meditation is a dialogue with Matthew's version of the feeding of the four thousand (Matthew 15:32-37).

*Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." <sup>33</sup> The disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus asked them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." <sup>35</sup> Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, <sup>36</sup> he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>37</sup> And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. <sup>38</sup> Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> After sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan. (NRSV)*

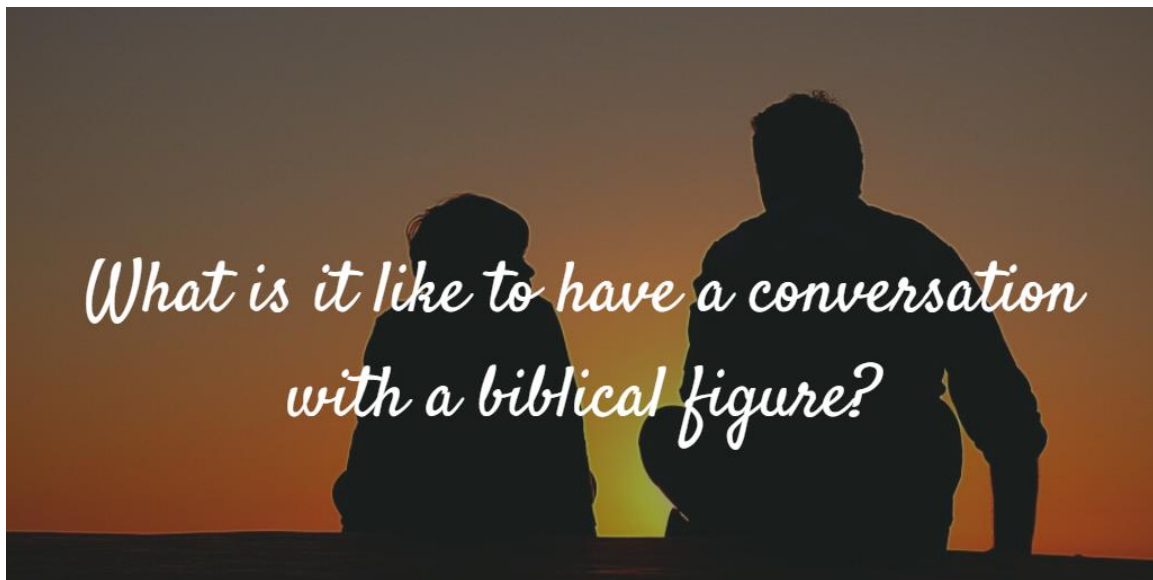
### The Practice

- Read the scripture slowly. You may want to read it more than once.
- Consider which character in the story you would like to interact with. It could be a person you find agreeable, or a person you want to question or debate with. Who are you drawn to? When you decide on a character, write the name at the top of your paper.
- Have an imaginary conversation—on paper—with the character in the story. You may want to stick with the theme of the scripture and talk about that or you may want to discuss other topics. It is completely up to you. Let your imagination roll free and see what transpires. (20 minutes)
- When you are finished, read your dialogue aloud.
- What is it like to have a conversation with a biblical figure? Why did you choose the character you chose? Did anything in the conversation surprise you? Did anything in the



conversation move you? Did you feel any inner “blocks” to doing this sort of exercise? Did you feel the presence and guidance of God in the dialogue? What did you learn about yourself as you engaged this biblical figure? How easy or difficult is it for you to have these kinds of imaginary conversations? How useful would you say such conversations are for you?

- End your reflection time with a prayer of gratitude for what you experienced.



December 6, 2018

Advent Meditation – Writing Your Own Psalm

Create a Psalm for Advent

The Psalms are among the most human expressions found in the Bible. Psalms give us confidence that no matter what emotion we are feeling, we can share it with God.

In this exercise, you will be invited to write your own Psalm. It doesn't matter whether you think of yourself as a writer or not. This is heartfelt communication, not an exercise in pretty writing.

Start by reading over Psalm 16 which is part of today's lectionary passages.

**Psalm 16**

*Song of Trust and Security in God*

<sup>1</sup>Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

<sup>2</sup>I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you."

<sup>3</sup>As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,  
in whom is all my delight.

<sup>4</sup>Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;  
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out  
or take their names upon my lips.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.

<sup>6</sup>The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
I have a goodly heritage.

<sup>7</sup>I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.

<sup>8</sup>I keep the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;  
my body also rests secure.

<sup>10</sup>For you do not give me up to Sheol,  
or let your faithful one see the Pit.

<sup>11</sup>You show me the path of life.  
In your presence there is fullness of joy;  
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (NRSV)

### The Practice

- Find a comfortable place to write.
- Ask God's Spirit to enliven you as you read this Psalm and then create one of your own.
- Write a free-form Psalm based on what you are going through in your own life. Or if you prefer, take this Psalm and re-write it. Be as honest with God as the Psalmists are.
- Read your Psalm aloud to yourself. Pray it. Offer it to God.



December 7, 2018

Advent Meditation – The Jesus Prayer

As we focus this Advent on the coming of Jesus, why not pray one of the most famous prayers in the history of Christianity—the Jesus Prayer?

You will find a version of this prayer in the Gospel of Luke’s story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The tax collector is praised by Jesus for humbling himself in prayer, saying “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Christians later expanded the prayer to “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” In the Gospel of Mark, blind Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” Orthodox Christians in the Middle Ages popularized this prayer, believing that the name of Jesus was a source of power and grace leading to a state of inner silence known as *hesychia*. In short, this prayer drew them closer to God.

### The Practice

- Decide how long you want to spend in this prayer.
- Choose a variation of the Jesus Prayer that suits you:
  - “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”
  - “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”
  - “Jesus, have mercy.”
  - “Christ, have mercy.”
- You may find a comfortable seated position or you may choose to walk around while engaged in this prayer.
- Breathe naturally and repeat the Jesus Prayer silently for the length of time you have chosen.
- When distractions crop up, return to the prayer.
- When your time is up, reflect on your experience of the Jesus Prayer. Describe your experience (you may want to journal on this). How did you notice the presence of God or Christ in this prayer? What is the value of repeating this prayer over and over silently? Did you notice any inner movements within your spirit as you prayed this prayer?
- End with a short prayer of gratitude.

December 8, 2018

Advent Meditation- Prayer of the Heart

Prayer doesn't have to be all that wordy. Early Christians used to pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," to express their deep longing for Jesus to return and be among them in physical reality. This practice is designed to help us create those prayers that are as close to us as our very breath. The beauty of this prayer is the way it stays with you all day, all week, or even a lifetime if you allow it.

### The Practice

- Begin seated in a comfortable position. Make sure your body weight is distributed in such a way that you feel stable. Take about five deep, slow breaths and allow the tension of the day to flow out with each exhalation. After five deliberate breaths, turn your attention away from counting and just allow your breath to find its natural pace.
- What is your deepest and truest desire in life right this moment? If you find your desires feel "tacky" or too worldly, try suspending judgment and instead looking at what's at the base of that desire. When you check in with your deepest and truest self, what it is that you want from God?
- When you identify your deepest desire, give it a short phrase. For example, if your deep desire is inner freedom, then your phrase would be "freedom" or "inner freedom." Make sure your desire phrase is not too long.
- What is your favorite name for God? How do you image the Creator? Choose whatever name seems to fit best for you. Some examples include: Jesus, Wisdom, Father, Mother, or Mystery. Be as creative as you want to be. But again, keep the name rather short.
- Combine your name for God with your desire. For example, if my phrase is "freedom" and the name I choose for God is Christ, my prayer of the heart might be "Freedom, in Christ." Spend a few moments coming up with your two-part prayer.
- Begin to say—either aloud or silently—your phrase. You may inhale on the name for God and exhale on the desire or vice versa. Spend several minutes breathing this prayer. Make it your own. Allow God to inhabit this prayer.
- After several minutes of repeating this prayer, sink into contemplative silence. Allow the love of God to fill you and surround you.
- If you want to be sure to remember this phrase to pray it throughout the day, write it down. You might want to place it on the back of a business card and put it in your wallet or pocket. Place it on a "post-it" next to your computer, or on the door of your refrigerator.

December 9, 2018

Advent Meditation on Jesus' Birth

We began the Advent meditations with the gospel of Luke's version of the flight of Mary and Joseph from their home while Mary was pregnant. Today we'll re-enter this story as the time comes for Mary to give birth. Once again, use your imagination to enter the scene. It's a short passage, so spend time not so much on the words but on the visual scene you create in your mind.

### The Practice

- Begin by asking God to be present in your imagination. Ask for the awareness to notice this presence.
- Read Luke 2: 5-7.

*Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (NRSV)*

- On the first reading, simply take in the details of the story. Pause in silence. Then read it a second time, slowly, allowing your mind to visualize Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem.
- With your mind's eye, see Mary approaching her time to deliver the baby. Watch her go into labor. Imagine yourself in the resting place Joseph has found for her to deliver—a manger. What do you see in the manger? Watch as she gives birth and attends to her newborn boy. What do the bands of cloth look like? Where do they come from? Let your imagination run free.
- What sounds do you hear in this place? What are Mary and Joseph saying? As you stand nearby, what are you saying? Does anyone speak to you? What is your reply? What sounds other than voices do you hear?
- What are the smells in Mary's delivery "room?" Linger a moment and imagine what you are smelling as you stand near the manger.

- In your imagination, move around the scene and touch things. Touch Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus or one of the people accompanying them. Touch an angel or a passer-by, if they are present in your scene. Touch the dirt of the resting place, the hide of an animal. Notice what sensations you experience as you imagine touching someone or something in the scene.
- Let your imagination have freedom as you allow the scene to change in any way you feel inspired. Imagine what more there is to the story than what is recorded in scripture. Linger and interact with the characters there. What are you doing? Do you go off to tell someone about your experience? How do you describe what happened?
- When you feel finished with the imagination exercise, think about the meaning of the birth of Jesus for your life. Consider the harsh conditions Mary likely had to endure to give birth. What does this mean for you? What part of the story warms your heart most? What part of the story disturbs you most? What insight does your imagination prayer provide?
- Dialogue with one of the characters in the story. Do this in your imagination or on paper—whatever is easiest for you.
- Conclude with a short prayer of thanks for all you experienced in this prayer.





December 10, 2018

Advent Meditation: The Daily Examen

This Advent, why not keep your eyes open for evidence of God's love and action in the world?

The motto Jesuits live by is "finding God in all things," and the way to do that is to examine your own daily life for the activity of the Spirit. Ignatius of Loyola—founder of the Jesuit order of the Catholic church—gave this prayer to his community and commanded them to do it every day. When practiced regularly, this prayer, known as the Daily Examen can be very useful in identifying where you receive spiritual energy and where you are in danger of losing it. It provides good information for you as you discern your place in the world.

### The Practice

- Make yourself comfortable and set aside some quiet time for this prayer. You may want to light a candle to signify the light of Christ illuminated in you.
- Rest into silence for a few moments.
- Ask God's Spirit to lead you through your day (month, season, event or other time in your life).
- Review and reflect.
  - If you could relive any one moment, which would it be? What happened in that moment that made it so life-giving? Sit with that moment and allow it to give you life again. Offer your gratitude to God for that moment.
  - If you could go back and change any one moment in your day, which would it be? What made that moment so difficult? Sit with that moment in the light of God's love and allow yourself to feel whatever emotion you have. Offer that moment to God for healing.
- Make a note of these highs and lows.
- End by giving thanks to God for all the ways God has been with you "in all things"—through the joy and the pain.



December 11, 2018

Advent Meditation: Praying with Questions

Advent invites us to embrace the mystery of incarnation—God’s action of dwelling in and among us. Because so much of our faith involves mystery, it can be helpful to acknowledge that and sit with it, even when it is uncomfortable. We can pray with this holy discomfort. We can pray our questions.

For this practice I have collected a series of questions for you to choose from. Or you may have one of your own ready to go!

### **The Practice**

- Find a comfortable setting to spend time with a question.
- Look over the list of questions below and select one you will be praying with. Or create your own.
- If you like to write your reflections, have a journal or writing material handy.
- Begin by asking God to be present to you in the midst of the question and your reflections on it.
- Spend at least 20 minutes in silence with your question.
  - First, open yourself to the question.
  - Allow your mind to settle and simply sit with the question for a few minutes.
  - What comes to mind? What is attractive to you about the question? What is disturbing?
  - How would you—at this time in your life—answer this question?
  - How is God present to you in either the question or your reflection on the question?
- Close with a short prayer of gratitude for the gifts that come in the questions and the mystery.

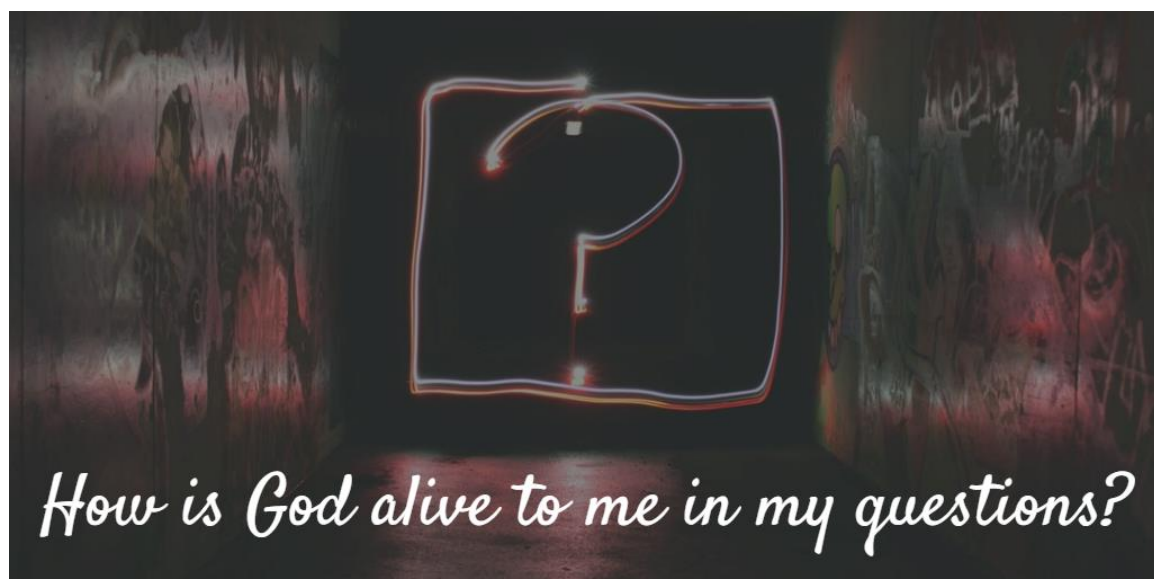
### **Some Questions to Ponder in the Exercise**

- What is it that you care most about in life?
- What is revelation from God? When have you experienced it?
- How can we find God? How does God find us?
- What is the true nature of God?
- In what ways does God intervene in the world?
- What is it that reconciles us with God?
- What is eternal life?
- When have you felt God’s presence most acutely in your life?
- How do you know when God is communicating with you?
- What is your deepest desire in life? How is God present in that desire?
- In what life activities do you experience God’s presence on a regular basis?
- In what activities do you feel blocked from God’s presence?
- When did you first notice God’s presence in your life?
- Who was God for you when you were a child?
- What do you want most from God?

- Can you recall a time you felt resentful, angry or afraid of God?
- Can you think of a time in which God intervened in your life?
- Are there patterns of events in your life? What does the pattern indicate to you?
- If you truly felt God's love and presence in your life today, how might your actions change?
- Can you think of a hard time in your life in which you were able to feel God's presence and guidance even in the midst of the pain?
- What event in your life changed the direction of your life?
- What are your particular spiritual gifts to the world?
- What brings you to prayer? Can you speak honestly and soulfully to God? How do you do that?

### *Questions Jesus Asked*

- What do you want me to do for you? (Mark 10:36)
- What are you looking for? (John 1:38)
- Why are you afraid? (Matt. 8:26)
- Why were you searching for me? (Luke 2:49)
- Why do you call me "Lord" yet do not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46)
- Where is your faith? (Luke 8:25)
- Who do you say I am? (Luke 9:20)
- What is written in the law? (Luke 10:26)
- What is the Kingdom of God like? (Luke 13:18)
- When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? (Luke 18:8)
- Why do you call me good? (Luke 18:19)
- Do you want to be made well? (John 5:6)
- Will you lay down your life for me? (John 13:38)
- My God, why have you forsaken me? (Mark 15:34)
- Have you believed because you have seen me? (John 20:29)
- Do you love me? (John 21:17)



December 12, 2018

Advent Meditation: Focusing

You've probably heard people say "your body has wisdom." And maybe you've wondered how to tap into that wisdom *before* the body gets cranky and pitches a pain fit.

Focusing prayer is a great way to step back from holiday stress this Advent. This prayer allows your body to show you what optimal health feels like.

The practice of focusing comes from the work of psychologist and philosophy professor Eugene Gendlin and has been popularized in Christian spirituality circles by Reverends Edwin McMahon and Peter Campbell who wrote the book *Bio-Spirituality: Focusing as a Way to Grow* from Loyola Press.

### The Practice

- Find a comfortable place to be still and quiet for 20-40 minutes. Begin by asking God to be present to you in your body and your "felt senses."
- You will be asking yourself a series of questions. You may write your responses down, but if writing feels like a distraction do not interrupt the exercise to write.
- Focusing steps:
  - Close your eyes and breathe. Let your awareness settle to the center of your body. What do you feel there?
  - What location or part of your body wants your awareness right now? (Spend time allowing this to emerge). Is there an important feeling in your body that needs listening to right now?
  - Communicate with this felt sense in your body. Tell it, "I'm here. I'm listening." Ask this bodily feeling if it's alright to go further.
  - What is the best way to describe this felt sense or sensation in your body? Is there an image that emerges? If it helps, give it a name (such as "tight neck" or "lump in the throat").
  - Sit with this body awareness without judgment. Simply observe.
  - Does this bodily sense have an emotional quality? What is it?
  - Ask "What gets it so \_\_\_\_\_ (name the emotion)?"
  - Ask the sensation what it needs.
  - Ask your body to show you how healing would feel.
  - You may want to put your hand on that part of the body and send it warmth. Also, if you feel so moved, ask Jesus, God or the Holy Spirit to help you care for this part of yourself.
  - Gently end your conversation with the felt sense. Thank your body and its senses for being with you in this prayer.
- End by journaling about what this bodily sense has to say to you about your life. Where do you feel God's healing touch most deeply? How is it to pray in this way? How is it to listen to your body? Offer a prayer of gratitude for God being present in your body.

December 13, 2018

Advent Meditation: Praying for others

Want to give a really meaningful gift to someone this Christmas? Pray for them. You don't have to tell them you are doing it. Nor do you have to forgo giving them a material gift if you really want to do that. Begin to think of intercessory prayer (praying for others) as part of your collection of spiritual gifts to impart to the world.

This particular form of intercessory prayer is adapted from Marjorie Thompson's best seller *Soul Feast*. It's particularly well suited for those of us who are not sure exactly how to pray for others.

### The Practice

- Begin seated comfortably in a chair. Take at least five deep, slow breaths. Allow your thoughts to slowly descend deep into the center of your being. Say to yourself, "Here I am in the presence of God's everlasting care and love."
- Using words, either spoken or unspoken, state who and what you are praying for. Let your prayer be uncensored. Just lay your heart's desire out before God.
- Then become silent. Allow a visual image of God surrounding the person to emerge in your imagination. It could be a bright light, it could be Jesus holding them in his arms, or any image that presents itself to you. In your mind's eye, see the person becoming whole and reconciled in the situation. Feel the grace of God transforming the person or situation.
- Using words, spoken or silent, ask God to work out God's desire and purpose for the person or situation. Release the person or situation into the fullness of God's care. Leave the outcome in God's hands.



*Want to give a really meaningful gift to someone  
this Christmas? Pray for them.*

## December 14

### Advent Meditation: Healing Prayer

While everything around us screams “holly, jolly Christmas,” this Advent season is not joyful for everyone. Many of our friends and family seek healing of the mind, body and spirit. The best way we can help is to offer healing prayer for them.

There is no *one way* to pray for healing. I like this prayer because it does not require that we know much of anything at all about any particular situation we are praying for. If you’ve ever had the experience of wanting healing for yourself or another person but not knowing what you want God to do for you or them, then you know how necessary a prayer like this is.

In this prayer, you simply visualize the person in the light of God’s love and healing power. You may also visualize Jesus—the great physician—laying his hands on the subject of your prayer. Rather than using words and petitioning for God’s help, in this prayer you are trusting in the certainty of God’s loving care and leaving the outcome in God’s hands.

#### The Practice

- Begin by lighting a candle as a symbol of the Divine Light.
- State your intention before God. “I am praying for God’s healing of \_\_\_\_\_.” Ask God for faith and trust in healing. Ask God for courage to let go of the outcome and to allow God’s healing to take any shape or form that God desires.
- Visualize a brilliant, warm, shining light from God surrounding you and softening your heart, mind and body. Bask in this “light of the world” for a few moments. Let it remain around you as you continue to pray.
- Visualize this warm light expanding and surrounding the person or situation that needs healing. See the light softening and releasing any dysfunction or pain. Feel love and compassion for the person or situation. Stay in prayer with this light for several minutes. In your mind’s eye, watch the light as it heals.
- If you have more than one person or situation to pray for, repeat the last step for each one.
- To complete this prayer, visualize the light that surrounded you and each prayer subject becoming more concentrated and burning brightly in your hearts.
- Close with a prayer of gratitude for the healing that takes place.

December 15, 2018

Advent Meditation: Franciscan prayer

Here's a prayer for busy people in the busy season of Advent. It's easy, portable and has a beautiful history.

Francis of Assisi (13<sup>th</sup> century) never set out to found an order. He simply wanted to restore an old church in his town and to live as Jesus did—as a wandering preacher with as few material possessions as possible. Amazingly, people began to emulate Francis and the “Order of Friars Minor,” which we now call the Franciscans, was created.

I suspect part of the attraction to Francis was his style of prayer. He offered short prayers throughout the day—whenever his inner spirit was moved. For Francis, simple acts of loving service were infused with prayer. Franciscan spirituality is marked by “free-flowing, spontaneous, informal praising, and loving dialogue with God.”<sup>ii</sup>

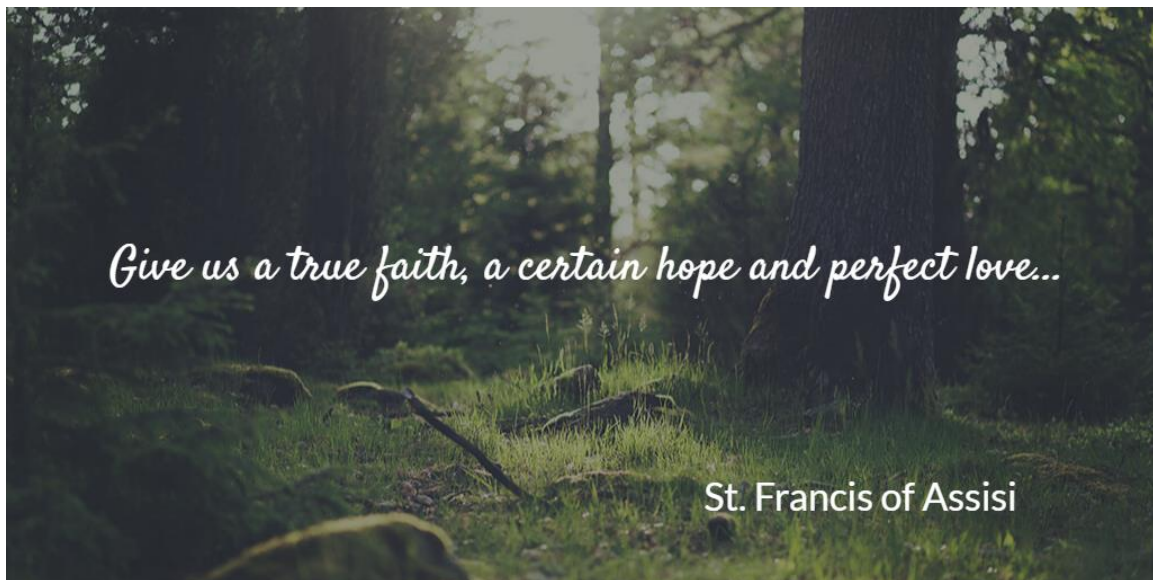
This practice is adapted from the chapter on “Franciscan Prayer” in *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types*, by Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey (Open Door, 1991).

### The Practice

- Decide on one daily activity that you will use as your prayer. It could be a walk, time with your pet, a phone conversation, a task at work that you enjoy or time in worship.
- Enter that activity with a short prayer of gratitude. Ask God to move your heart in prayer throughout the activity.
- Be aware as you proceed with the activity of when your heart is moved. As you feel touched, moved or inspired, offer a spontaneous silent prayer.
- Think of the other people (or creatures) in or around in your activity and notice something of God's goodness and mercy in them. As you are moved, offer a spontaneous silent prayer for the person (or creature).
- Ask yourself, what—in this activity—helps me better appreciate God's activity in the world?
- Be especially aware of the joy that you find in this activity. As you notice the joy, radiate that joy back to God in a silent, wordless way.



- When the activity ends, reflect upon how this prayer felt for you. How was it to not stop and pray but to keep going and praying at the same time? Is this how you pray naturally? Where did you feel the presence of God most deeply? How did interaction with the other person change as a result of your spontaneous prayer?
- If you so desire, write about this prayer in a journal.
- Close with a final short prayer. Be silent for a few moments and see what short prayer forms in your heart.



## December 16

### Advent Meditation: Imagination Prayer

As we pray our way through Luke's narrative of the birth of Jesus, today we meet the shepherds who encounter an angel announcing the birth of Jesus.

We are only praying with three verses from Luke chapter 2, so it will be up to your imagination to create all the action here!

#### The Practice

- Begin by trusting that God is present in your imagination. Ask for the awareness to notice this presence.
- Read Luke 2:8-11.

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Christ, the Lord. (NRSV)*

- On the first reading, simply take in the details of the story. Pause in silence. Then read it a second time, slowly, allowing your mind to visualize the scene.
- With your mind's eye, see the shepherds living in the fields. Visualize the fields at night. Imagine you are one of the shepherds. Have a conversation with the others. See the flocks.
- Then you see an angel standing before you. Let yourself visualize this angel. What does the glory of the Lord look like to you? How do you feel before it? Are you terrified? Imagine you did not already know what was happening—how would it be to see and hear an angel of the Lord?
- Hear the angel's pronouncement. Imagine your sense of wonder as the angel tells you he or she is bringing "good news of great joy for all the people." Ponder the news. "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."
- Have a conversation with the angel. Ask him or her anything on your heart.
- Let your imagination have freedom as you allow the scene to change in any way you feel inspired. Imagine what more there is to the story than what is recorded in scripture. Linger and interact with the characters there. What are you doing? Do you go off to tell someone about your experience? How do you describe what happened?

- When you feel finished with the imagination exercise, think about what it means to have an angel appear to a field worker to announce God's good news. How does what you experienced in this prayer connect with your life today?
- Conclude with a short prayer of thanks for all you experienced in this prayer.



*Imagine all the people living life in peace...*

*~ John Lennon*

## December 17, 2018

### Advent Meditation: Prayer Walk

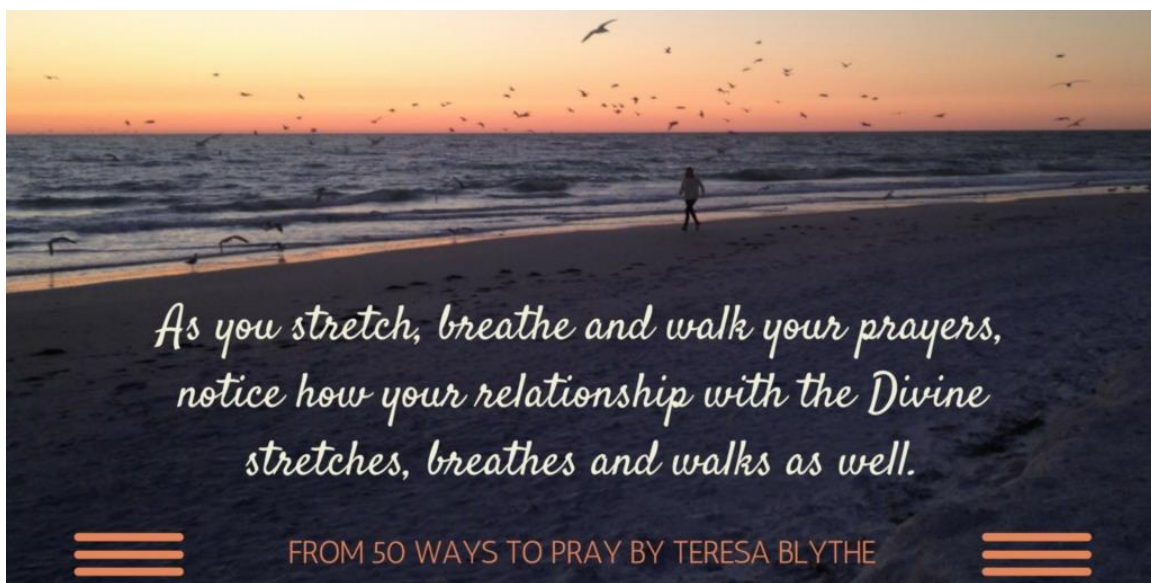
Advent heralds the beginning of winter, a time when many of us seek comfort and warmth inside our homes. This prayer invites you to bundle up and go outside for a little while. It's a great practice for people who find they need to be doing something active in order to focus on God.

Mindful walking is a devotional practice in many religions. It is prayer in motion, walking calmly and confidently in God's presence. It differs from your daily "power walk" in that you are not trying to walk faster, longer or more vigorously. You are not trying to get somewhere. You are just walking in the light of God's love, listening to the gentle rhythm of your breathing, your stride, your heartbeat.

#### The Practice

- Decide where you will be walking.
- Begin the walk with only one intention—to experience God in the walking. Express that intention to God and ask for God's grace along the walk.
- Ask God to use the walk to communicate something to you.
- Keep your senses open to any sight, sound, smell or taste that you may experience. Be open and accepting but do not be anxious for this experience. Let it unfold.
- Listen to your breath as you walk slowly. How many steps are you taking per breath? Just observe. Do not control.
- Listen to your heartbeat.
- Listen to the sound of your footsteps.
- Listen to the environment around you.
- If you have a "prayer of the heart" that you want to recite, say one half on the inhalation and the other on the exhalation. For example: "Lord in your grace" (inhale), "Grant your peace" (exhale). Repeat this along the walk.

- When your walk is finished, stretch your arms toward heaven and say a prayer of gratitude for mobility, breath and life.
- If you wish, you may journal about this experience at the end. What was it like to pray in this way? Where did you experience God's grace along the walk? Where did you feel God communicating with you? What did you notice? What part of the prayer was easiest for you? What part was most difficult?



## December 18

### Advent Meditation: journaling

Advent is a time of reflection. Paying attention to what has been, what is and what we hope will be in the future. Just as Mary pondered the mystery of what God was doing in her life, we ponder the same. It may not feel as dramatic as Mary's experience, but it is still very important.

Journaling to connect with God has a long history with Christians. Much of what we know about early American Protestantism comes from journals kept by faithful people. One of the freeing things about journaling is that you can write whatever you want to write. There are no rules!

Journaling is for anyone who wants to try it. You do *not* have to be a good writer. This isn't for publication or even posterity (unless you want it to be). This is for spiritual practice.

### The Practice

- Decide how you want to keep this journal. You may purchase a blank book or use loose leaf paper held in a ringed notebook.
- Think about what you would enjoy putting in your journal. You may want to record insights from other prayer practices or write your prayers in the journal or both. Some people even keep notes from their dreams in their journal. It's a book that belongs to you and God. Do with it what feels best.
- Begin by asking God for awareness of God's presence in this journal-keeping exercise.
- To explore spiritual growth based on events in your life, write about:

A significant event or happening in your daily life.

How do you feel about that event?

Where was God at work in the event?

Where is God leading me now as a result of this event?

How do my feelings change as I view the event in the light of God's love?

- To notice how God is active in your life:

Review your journal at regular intervals.

What patterns or common themes do you notice?

How does God get your attention?

How has God answered your prayers?

Assess how your relationship with God is emerging.

- Make notes about any common themes or patterns.
- Close each journaling session with a prayer of gratitude

December 19, 2018

Advent Meditation: Dialogue with Scripture

When Jesus begins a story with “What do you think?” we are invited to share exactly what we think about the story. The following is an illustration about what it means to be faithful. So, what do *you* think?

### The Practice

Matthew 21:28-32 The Parable of the Two Sons

<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ <sup>29</sup> The son answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup> The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. <sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him. (NRSV)

- Read the scripture slowly. You may want to read it more than once.
- Consider who you would like to interact with. It could be the son you find agreeable, or the son you want to question or debate with. It could be Jesus. Who are you drawn to? When you decide on a character, write the name at the top of your paper.
- Have an imaginary conversation—on paper—with the character in the story. You may want to stick with the theme of the scripture and talk about that or you may want to discuss other topics. It is completely up to you. Let your imagination roll free and see what transpires. (20 minutes)
- When you are finished, read your dialogue aloud.
- What is it like to have a conversation with a biblical figure? Why did you choose the character you chose? Did anything in the conversation surprise you? Did anything in the conversation move you? Did you feel any inner “blocks” to doing this sort of exercise? Did you feel the presence and guidance of God in the dialogue? What did you learn about yourself as you engaged this biblical figure? How easy or difficult is it for you to have these kinds of imaginary conversations? How useful would you say such conversations are for you?
- End your reflection time with a prayer of gratitude for what you experienced.



## December 20, 2018

### Advent Meditation: Prayer of Desire

Desire is a popular emotion in Advent. Advertisers use our superficial desires in the hope that we will want and buy things we (and our gift recipients) probably don't need. This prayer looks at our deeper desires—the ones that come from God and inspire us to fulfill God's desire.

This is a good prayer to use when you feel like your desires are getting out of hand. It allows you to give them over to God.

#### The Practice

- Begin by taking a few moments to become calm. Say a prayer of gratitude for all that has been, all that is, and all that will be in your life.
- Let your heart's deepest desire be stated before God. Take a few moments in silence to see if the desire remains the same or if you want to state it in a different way.
- Visualize your desire. Feel it. Touch it. Taste it. Smell it. Let it become real to you in your imagination. Linger there and see how the scene depicting your desire develops or changes. *Stay with this step for several minutes.*
- Let go of specific outcomes. Ask that God's desire be fulfilled in your desire, or that God will transform your desire as needed. Notice what, if anything, changes as a result of that request.
- Ask God how you might assist in fulfilling this desire. Stay in silence as you allow space for God to speak in and through your imagination.
- Close by thanking God for this desire and for the opportunity to pray in and through it. Thank God for being present in this prayer.
- Spend a few moments right after the prayer reflecting on how it was to pray with a desire. What surprised you? Moved you? Inspired you? What disturbed you? How did you feel God's presence in the midst of this prayer? Did anything about your desire change as you prayed it?
- In the days following this prayer, be aware of ways God may be offering you opportunities to live into the desire. When they do, take prayerful action and don't forget to thank God for the opportunities and eyes to see them.

December 21, 2018

Advent Meditation: Imagining the Heavenly Host

As we continue our Advent imagination prayer with Luke's birth narrative, we spend more time today with the shepherds, angel and the multitude of the heavenly host.

Imagination prayer has a long history. St. Ignatius of Loyola built his *Spiritual Exercises* – a set of meditations, reflections and practices to draw a person's heart deeper toward Christ – on imagination prayers. He invites us to become part of the scene as our minds imagine what it might have been like in Jesus' time.

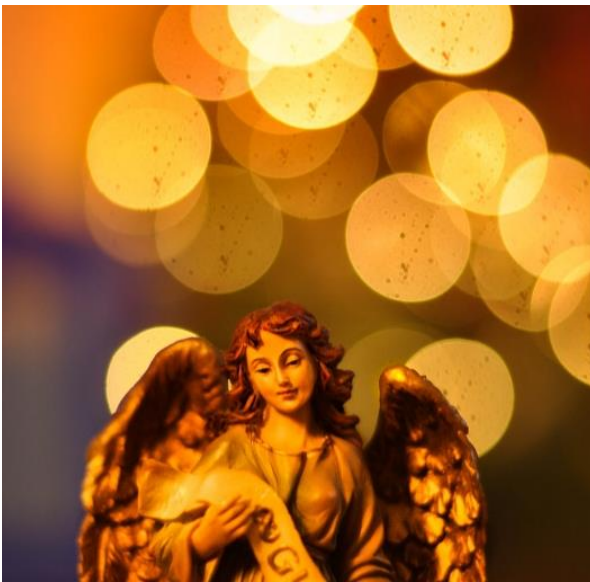
### The Practice

Luke 2: 12-14

*This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”<sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!”*

- Take a few moments to become quiet inside. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you become aware of God's presence in your imagination.
- Enter the scene. Become any character you desire—a shepherd, an angel, a passer-by--someone in the story or a character you create. Or you can choose to just be yourself in the scene.
- Notice where you are—in the fields tending the sheep or near enough to watch the scene unfold.
- There is an angel announcing the coming of the Christ. Visualize this angel.
- Suddenly with this angel is a whole group of heavenly entities. They are all praising God. You listen as they say or sing their words of praise.
- Imagine this multitude milling about the fields with you and the shepherds.

- What do you feel inspired to say or do? Start a conversation with one of them? Stand by and gaze at the scene without using words? How do you respond to this glorious multitude?
- When you are ready, thank all the shepherds, angels and heavenly host for their part in this story. End by spending a few moments in gratitude to God for this experience of prayer.



“

*And suddenly there was  
with the angel  
a multitude of the heavenly hosts....*

LUKE 2: 13

December 22, 2018

Advent Meditation: Praying the Benedictus

One of the most beautiful passages in Luke's gospel is the prophecy of Zechariah, a poem known as the Benedictus. Zechariah was a priest married to Elizabeth and in their advanced age they conceived a long-awaited child—a boy who would become John the Baptist, a relative of Jesus. Zechariah didn't believe the angel Gabriel when he said that Elizabeth would bear a child, so as a sign of his lack of faith, Zechariah was stripped of his ability to speak until the child arrived.

After John's birth, Zechariah was once again able to speak and this prophecy is what he delivered.

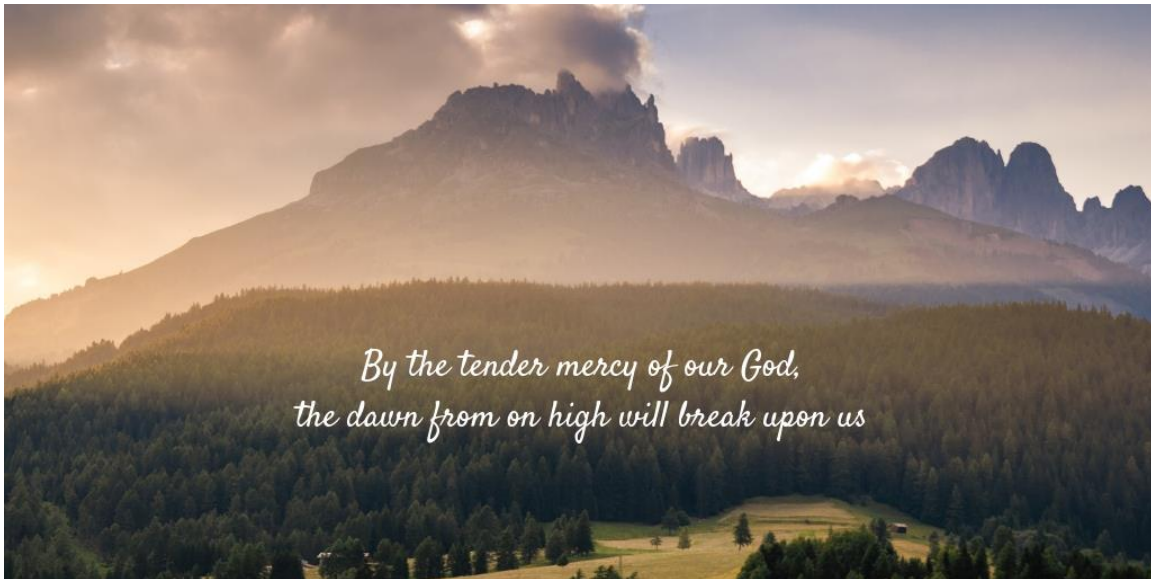
### The Practice

- Read the Benedictus through more than once. Notice any word, phrase or image that seems to resonate deeply within your heart.

#### ***Zechariah's Prophecy***

<sup>68</sup> *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.  
<sup>69</sup> He has raised up a mighty savior for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
<sup>70</sup> as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
<sup>71</sup> that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who  
hate us.  
<sup>72</sup> Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered his holy covenant,  
<sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,  
to grant us<sup>74</sup> that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness  
before him all our days.  
<sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
<sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.  
<sup>78</sup> By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace."*  
<sup>80</sup> *The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the  
wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel. (NRSV)*

- Let the word, phrase or image that resonates for you stay with you. Pray with that phrase. Use it like a mantra to breathe with.
- Spend a few minutes reflecting on the word, phrase or image. How does it connect with your life today? How does it connect with what is going on in the world today? What might God be saying to you in this word, phrase or image?
- Express to God your needs, hopes, desires and gratitude. Let this be a time of unbridled conversation with God.
- Sink into deep silence as you close.
- If you desire, write down your word, phrase or image and journal about your prayer experience.



## December 23, 2018

### Advent Meditation: Praying the Nativity

Our Advent imagination prayer is getting closer to the manger! Today's passage has the angels departing for heaven and the shepherds taking to the road to Bethlehem to check out this birth for themselves.

As you imagine yourself part of the shepherd's caravan, see if you can catch the emotion in the scene.

#### The Practice

- Begin by turning your attention to the presence of God in prayer. Ask for the awareness of how God interacts with your imagination.
- Read the selected portion of Luke's birth narrative below.

*Luke 2: 15-18*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.*

- Imagine yourself with the shepherds in the fields, watching as the angels departed. Be part of the conversation about going to Bethlehem. Notice the energy and emotion in the air.
- Be with the shepherds in the caravan to Bethlehem. Talk with them. Soak in the scene as you ride from wherever they were tending their flocks to the town of Bethlehem.
- Let yourself see the scene as they pull up to the structure where Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus are taking refuge. What does it look like?
- As you step inside, give yourself plenty of time to look around and take in the scene. What do you notice?
- Take time to gaze into the eyes of the newborn Jesus.
- Notice who is in the room with you. Talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with.
- After your time with the family is up, leave with the shepherds. Listen as they discuss how they are going to explain what they have experienced to other people.
- Stay with them awhile. As they go into the next town and talk with people, notice how they articulate their experience. What would you have to say about what you saw, heard and felt?
- End this prayer with gratitude for all you have experienced.

December 24, 2018

## Final Day of Advent

Advent Meditation: Lectio Divina with Matthew's Nativity

The end of Advent brings what Christians have been waiting for: the birth of Jesus. There are only two stories of Jesus' birth in the Gospels—Luke's and Matthew's. For this prayer, we will be using *lectio divina* (praying with scripture) with Matthew's nativity story.

When praying scripture, it is more important that you allow the scripture to speak to you than it is to intellectually understand it. There is a time and place for interpretation and historical context, but *lectio divina* is not about putting it all together and making sense of scripture. It's about experiencing scripture as a living window to the Divine.

### The Practice

- Read Matthew's birth narrative through more than once. Notice any word, phrase or image that seems to resonate deeply within your heart.

*The Birth of Jesus the Messiah*

*Matthew 1:18-25*

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." <sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup> but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

- Let the word, phrase or image that resonates for you stay with you. Pray with that phrase. Use it like a mantra to breathe with.
- Spend a few minutes reflecting on the word, phrase or image. How does it connect with your life today? How does it connect with what is going on in the world today? What might God be saying to you in this word, phrase or image?
- Express to God your needs, hopes, desires and gratitude. Let this be a time of unbridled conversation with God.
- Sink into deep silence as you close.



- If you desire, write down your word, phrase or image and journal about your prayer experience.

I hope you had a wonderful Advent and learned or enjoyed many new spiritual practices. Merry Christmas. The Prince of Peace is with us.

### The end

If you would like an entire book of spiritual practices, you might enjoy my book *50 Ways to Pray* from Abingdon Press. Find it and my newest book *Spiritual Direction 101* on my [Author's Page](#) at Amazon.

Would you be interested in learning more about the practice of spiritual direction? My website at [www.teresablythe.net](http://www.teresablythe.net) has a wealth of information about what spiritual direction is, who finds it helpful and how to find a spiritual director.

I love to interact with my readers. If you have questions about spiritual practices or spiritual direction, drop me an email at [teresa@teresablythe.net](mailto:teresa@teresablythe.net).

Thank you for downloading this free ebooklet. Feel free to pass it along to anyone who might enjoy it.



---

<sup>i</sup> *Beginning to Pray*, Anthony Bloom. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1970) Pp. 85-86.

<sup>ii</sup> *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types*, by Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey (Open Door, 1991) p. 70. See their chapter on Franciscan Prayer on pages 69-78.